DECISION RECORD

Reference: Environmental Assessment for Grazing Authorization, #NM-060-98-084

Decision: It is my decision to authorize the issuance of a ten year grazing lease to Floyd E. Proctor Et. Al. for the Bureau of Land Management grazing allotment #63009. The lease will authorize 11 cows yearlong at 100% Federal Range from March 1 to the end of February, for 132 Animal Unit Months (AUM's). Any additional mitigation measures identified in the environmental impacts sections of the referenced environmental assessment have been formulated into stipulations, terms and conditions. Any comments made to this proposed action were considered and any necessary changes have been incorporated into the environmental assessment.

Change form the original EA

The name of the lessee was changed from Mrs. Floyd E. Proctor to Floyd E. Proctor Et. A> No other changes were made to the EA.

If you wish to protest this proposed decision in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.2, you are allowed 15 days to do so in person or in writing to the authorized officer, after the receipt of this decision. Please be specific in your points of protest. In the absence of a protest, this proposed decision will become the final decision of the authorized officer without further notice, in accordance with 43 CFR 4160.3. A period of 30 days following receipt of the final decision, or 30 days after the date the proposed decision becomes final, is provided for filing an appeal and petition for the stay of the decision, for the purpose of a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge (43 CFR 4.470).

The appeal shall be filed with the office of the Field Office Manager, 2909 West Second, Roswell, NM, 88201, and must state clearly and concisely your specific points.

Signed by T. R Kreager 8/12/99
Assistant Field Manager Date

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
FOR
GRAZING AUTHORIZATION

ALLOTMENT 63009

EA-NM-066-98-084

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
ROSWELL FIELD OFFICE
ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO

Environmental Assessment for Grazing Allotment 63009

I. Introduction

A. Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action

The grazing regulations allow for a ten-year lease to be issued for grazing outside the grazing district boundary. The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement(RMP/EIS) states a livestock grazing management goal of providing effective and efficient management of allotments to maintain, improve and monitor range conditions. A site specific analysis of the impacts of renewing a grazing lease to the applicant, Mrs. Floyd Proctor, is needed for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and to make an informed decision.

This document will analyze the site specifics of authorizing the renewal of the lease on allotment 63009. This allotment is within the *Pinion/Ju*niper vegetative community as identified in the Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS). Vegetative communities managed by the Roswell Field Office are identified and explained in the RMP/EIS. Appendix 11 of the draft RMP/EIS describes the Desired Plant Community (DPC) concept and identifies the components of each community.

B. Conformance With Land Use Planning

The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (October 1997) has been reviewed to determine if the proposed action conforms with the land use plan's Record of Decision. The Roswell Resource Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (RMP/EIS) states a livestock grazing management goal of providing effective and efficient management of allotments to maintain, improve and monitor range conditions. The proposed action is consistent with the RMP/EIS.

C. Relationships to Statutes, Regulations, or Other Plans

The proposed action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1700 et seq.); the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 (43 U.S.C. 315 et seq.), as amended; the Clean Water Act (CWA) (33 U.S.C. 1251 et seq.), as amended; the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1535 et seq.) as amended; and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (43 U.S.C. 1901 et seq.).

II. Proposed Action and Alternatives

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to authorize a grazing lease on allotment 63009 for 11 Animal Units (AUs) year long for 132 animal unit months (AUMs). The lease would be specifically for 11 cows from March 1st to the end of February (yearlong) for 132 AUMs. The lease would be offered to Mrs. Floyd Proctor.

B. No authorization alternative:

This alternative, if selected, would be to not issue a grazing lease for allotment 63009. No grazing would be authorized on the federal land within allotment 63009 under this alternative.

III. Affected Environment

A. General Setting

Allotment 63009 is located in Lincoln County, about 20 miles southeast of Corona, New Mexico. The allotment is made up of 610 acres of federal land and approximately 1,120 acres of private land. The area is grazed by cattle. The allotment is watered by wells and a dirt tank.. (See attached map).

The area of allotment 63009 consists of pinion-juniper covered hills. The elevation is 5,600 feet above sea level. Grass understory and shrub species grow in conjunction with the pinion-juniper. The average recorded precipitation for the area is 15.87 inches (recorded in Corona, NM). Most of the annual precipitation falls during high intensity, short duration thunderstorms.

The following resources or values are not present or would not be affected: Prime/Unique Farmland, Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns, Riparian/Wetlands, Wild and Scenic Rivers, Hazardous Wastes, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, and Minority/Low Income populations.

B. Affected Resources

1. Soils

The soils present on allotment 63009 are primarily the Deama-Pastura association. The soils are moderately sloping on the uplands. The Deama soil is very shallow and shallow and is well drained. It formed in material derived dominantly from limestone. Typically, the Deama soil is brown very cobbly loam about 7 inches deep over limestone.

Permeability of the Deama soil is moderate. Effective rooting depth is 7 to 20 inches. Available water capacity is very low. Runoff is rapid, and the hazard of water erosion is high. The hazard of soil blowing is slight.

The Pastura soil is very shallow and shallow and is well drained. It formed in alluvium derived dominantly from limestone. Typically, the upper 2 inches of the surface layer is brown loam and the lower 5 inches is brown clay loam. The substratum is brown gravelly clay loam about 6 inches thick over indurated caliche.

Permeability of the Pastura soil is moderate. Effective rooting depth is 5 to 20 inches. Available water capacity is very low. Runoff is rapid, and the hazard of water erosion is high. The hazard for soil blowing is high. More information on the soils can be found in the "Soil Survey of Lincoln County Area New Mexico".

2. Vegetation

The ecological (range) site for the area is Hills CP-3. In conjunction with the overstory of pinion-juniper, blue grama, black grama, sideoats grama, sand muhly, ear muhly, three-awn, and wolftail form the understory. Shrubs include yucca, cholla cactus, and snakeweed. Forbs of various species occurs when moisture conditions are favorable.

A vegetative study on this allotment which were established in 1991. Analysis of the monitoring data collected from this study indicates that there is sufficient forage produced on the federal land for 11 AUs. The data shows the ecological condition for the area evaluated to be in good condition. Copies of the monitoring data and the analysis of the data are available at the Roswell Field Office.

3. Wildlife

The area provides habitat for small animals, birds, rodents, and a population of mule deer. The tree species provide cover for larger wildlife species.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species

The only known threatened or endangered species of plants or animals on allotment 63009 is the bald eagle. A list of federal threatened, endangered and candidate species reviewed for this EA can be found in Appendix 11 of the Roswell Approved RMP (AP11-2). Of the listed species, avian species such as the bald eagle and peregrine falcon may be observed in the general geographic area during migration or winter months. There are no designated critical habitat areas within the allotment.

5. Livestock Management

The allotment is grazed by cattle. The latest grazing lease for the federal land was for 11 cows. Livestock manipulation is limited because there is only one pasture. Utilization of the forage resource is controlled by purchasing or liquidating livestock.

6. Visual Resources

The area of Allotment 63009 is located within a Class IV Visual Resource Management (VRM) area. The Class IV rating means that contrasts may attract attention and be a dominant feature in the landscape in terms of scale. However, the changes should repeat the basic elements of the landscape.

7. Water Quality

One dirt tank exists on the federal land. The dirt tank holds surface water for a short period after receiving runoff from precipitation events. No wells tap the ground water on the federal land. Ground water in the area is moderately shallow to deep.

8. Floodplains

Red Bluff Draw, on the sourthern part of the allotment, is considered to be in the floodplain. The draw crosses the allotment for approximately 1.5 miles. Water pipelines, fences and roads cross the floodplains, no adverse impacts have resulted from these improvements. Furture permanent, above-ground structures will be authorized on BLM lands within the fllod-plains only if no practicable alternative exists. Only minor additional development, such as fencing, would be expected, but no projects are currently planned.

9. Air Quality

Air quality is good. The area is in a Class II area for the prevention of significant deterioration of air as defined in the federal Clean Air Act. Class II areas allow a moderate amount of air quality degradation.

10. Recreation

Since this allotment has no facility based recreational activities, only dispersed recreational opportunities occur on these lands. Recreational activities that occur include hunting, caving, sightseeing, Off Highway Vehicle Use, primitive camping, horseback riding and hiking.

Legal and physical Access to public lands located in this allotment are through state lands and county maintained roads. Off Highway Vehicle designation for public lands within this allotment are classified as "Limited" to existing roads and trails. The majority of public lands in this allotment can only be accessed by foot (hiking, or walking).

11. Caves and Karst

A complete significant cave or karst inventory has not been completed for the federal lands located in this grazing allotment. Presently, no known significant caves or karst features have been identified within this allotment. If at a later date, a significant cave or karst feature is located on public lands within this allotment, that cave or feature may be fenced to exclude livestock grazing and Off Highway Vehicle Use. A separate Environmental analysis would be prepared to construct this exclosure fence.

This allotment is located within a designated area of High Karst or Cave Potential.

IV. Environmental Impacts

A. Impacts of the Proposed Action

1. Soils

The soils will be influenced by livestock grazing through hoof action and the removal of standing vegetation. Infiltration rates will be increased by chipping of soil surface over most of the area but will be decreased by compaction around watering, trailing, and bedding areas. The area of compaction would be relatively small. Livestock grazing will remove vegetation that would have reduced the erosive forces of wind, rain, and surface runoff. Proper utilization levels and grazing distribution patterns will retain sufficient vegetative cover so as to maintain the stability of the soils. The level of grazing identified in the proposed action, would continue to maintain an adequate ground cover for protection and development of the soils. The percentage of bare ground and rock found on the allotment fall within the parameters established by the RMP/EIS for this vegetative community.

2. Vegetation

Vegetation grazed by domestic livestock and wildlife is not adversely affected unless the amount of utilization is severe over an extended period of time. Ecological condition as shown by the data collected in 1991 indicates that the vegetation is sustainable at the past and proposed amount of grazing by livestock. The pinion-juniper trees in the area will increase naturally unless controlled by some method.

3. Wildlife

Wildlife will continue to compete with domestic livestock for forage and browse. Cover habitat for wildlife will increase as the pinion-juniper increases. Wildlife populations will not be changed significantly by livestock grazing.

4. Threatened & Endangered Species

Livestock grazing, as a result of renewal of the grazing lease, may affect, but not likely adversely affect the bald eagle. It is expected that habitat and range condition would be maintained or improved by authorizing grazing conducive with vegetation production goals. Habitat for wintering bald eagles would not be negatively impacted by livestock grazing. There would be no effect to the peregrine falcon as important riparian habitat or potential nest sites are not found on the allotment. No occupied or historic nesting habitat occurs within the allotment or within 3400 meters (2.1 mi.) of the exterior allotment boundary.

5. Livestock Management

The proposed action would allow the existing livestock management to continue. The existing management is not causing any adverse impacts to the environment. The distribution and supply of livestock water on adjacent land is available for wildlife. Livestock grazing will continue to maintain or increase ground cover by stimulating growth of vegetation and by scattering litter which protects the soil from wind and water erosion.

6. Visual Resources

Visual resources will be managed to meet the Visual Resource Management (VRM) classes. All proposed management activities will be evaluated with regard to visual resource management and those projects that are compatible with the character of the natural landscape will be encouraged. No management actions should be proposed that would degrade visual quality to the extent that a change in any VRM class will result. The continued grazing of livestock would not affect

the form or color of the landscape, or the primary aspect of the vegetation within the allotment.

7. Water Quality

Livestock grazing will not have a significant influence on water quality since there is no perennial live water exist. A small amount of sediments increase into the water channels may occur but is related primarily to the intensity and duration of the precipitation occurrence and affected only slightly by livestock grazing activities. The ground water is not affected by livestock grazing.

8. Floodplains

No impacts to the floodplains are known, by keeping above ground structures out of the floodplains, impacts should not occur.

9. Air Quality

The proposed action will not have an effect on the air quality. The air quality will remain virtually the same as present.

10. Recreation

Grazing should have little or no impact on the dispersed recreational opportunities within this allotment, since the recreational use of these public lands are relatively low. The evidence or presence of livestock can negatively affect visitors who desire solitude, unspoiled landscape views or hike without seeing signs of livestock. However, grazing can benefit some forms or recreation, such as hunting, by creating new water sources for game animals.

11. Caves and Karst

No known significant caves or karst features are known to exist on the public lands located within this allotment. Grazing would not affect the karst resources.

B. Impacts of the No Livestock Grazing Alternative

1. Soils

The soil will not be subjected to compaction, chipping, and standing vegetation reduction that are associated with livestock grazing. The stability and development of the soil would be about the same as with grazing. Soil

compaction would be reduced on the allotment around drinking troughs and along trails.

2. Vegetation

There would be a small change in the types and amounts of vegetation found within the allotment. It is expected that the number of plant species found within the allotment will remain the same. Vegetation will continue to be utilized by wildlife but the removal of the standing vegetation by livestock would be absent, which would result in an increase in the amount of standing vegetation and an increase in the accumulated litter on the ground. The pinion-juniper will increase in density with or without grazing.

3. Wildlife

There would be no competition between livestock and wildlife for forage and cover.

4. Threatened and Endangered Species

There would be no change to the bald eagle or the peregrine falcon habitat if the no grazing alternative was selected.

5. Livestock Management

Under the no grazing alternative there would be no grazing authorized on the federal land in the area of allotment 63009. This would have an adverse economic impact to the livestock operation.

6. Visual Resources

No change in the visual resources; scale, land-form, and color; will occur with the no grazing alternative.

7. Water Quality

A slight reduction of sediment into the water courses could be expected with the no grazing alternative because the removal of standing vegetation will not be occurring to the degree allowed in the proposed action. More standing vegetation will slow runoff during precipitation events which will reduce sediments into runoff. Ground water will not be changed by the no grazing alternative.

8. Floodplains

The impacts would be the same as the proposed action.

9. Air Quality

There would be no change to the in air quality with the no grazing alternative.

10. Recreation

The impacts would be the same as the proposed action.

11. Caves and Karst

No known significant caves or karst features are known to exist on the public lands located within this allotment. Grazing would not affect the karst resources. This allotment is located within a designated area of High Karst or Cave Potential.

V. Cumulative Impacts

No cumulative impacts to the environment are anticipated by the authorization of grazing as listed in the proposed action or from the no action alternative.

VI. Residual Impacts

No residual impacts are anticipated for the proposed action or the alternative(s).

VII. Mitigating Measures

If new information surfaces that indicate that livestock grazing is negatively impacting other resources, action will be taken to mitigate those impacts.